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SUBJECT: BURJANADZE SPEAKS OUT, OPPOSITION CALLS FOR
ELECTIONS, NEW CHARGES AGAINST OKRUASHVILI

REF: A. TBILISI 2437

[B. TBILISI 2464](#)

¶11. (U) Summary: In her first comments regarding the Okruashvili arrest, Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze called Okruashvili's allegations against President Saakashvili "absurd" and criticized the Government's personnel policy which allowed people such as Okruashvili to enter government. She also called the government's delay in reacting to former Defense Minister Okruashvili's wrongdoings a mistake. Burjanadze called for constructive dialogue with the opposition. A new opposition coalition, called the United National Council, announced plans to launch a nationwide campaign to persuade the GoG to hold early Parliamentary elections in April 2008. The coalition announced plans to travel to all regions of Georgia and promised a second large rally on November 2. Over 700 people attended an opposition meeting October 3 to discuss the coalition's next steps. Deputy Prosecutor General Gvaramia announced additional charges of corruption against Okruashvili involving high level Defense Ministry officials and Okruashvili's friend Kibar Khalvashi. End Summary.

Speaker Burjanadze Breaks Silence, Calls for Dialogue

¶12. (U) On October 3 in her first comments regarding Okruashvili's arrest, Burjanadze called Okruashvili's accusations against President Saakashvili "utterly absurd." She added the only way to resolve the political uproar is for Okruashvili to provide evidence of his claims or be held responsible for his own wrongdoings. Burjanadze also criticized law enforcement for not arresting Okruashvili in a timely manner. She stated the GoG needs to reassess its personnel policy for making ministerial and other high-ranking appointments. She cited Okruashvili's ability to reach high office as evidence the system is seriously flawed and requires reconsideration. Burjanadze also called for "serious dialogue" with the opposition to develop mechanisms jointly which will strengthen democratic institutions and instill trust in the GoG. She added that polarization between society and the authorities is unacceptable for the country's interests.

Opposition Coalesces, Calls for Early Elections

¶13. (U) On October 2, the opposition coalition, now calling itself the United National Council and including ten parties, called for Georgia to become a "parliamentary republic" and for parliamentary elections to be moved to April 2008, as formerly scheduled. Absent from the meetings were the

Industrialists and the New Rightists (ref B), as well as Irina Sarishvili's recently founded Imedi party. In a meeting held October 3 in the Chess Palace, over 700 people gathered to hear historian Marika Lortkipanidze argue that the Georgian people should hold a referendum to make any changes in the government. Many objected to her remarks, including Georgia's Way leader Salome Zourbichvili, who left the hall in protest. The slogan "Georgia without a President" was the theme of the rally, reflecting the idea of making Georgia a parliamentary republic. The United National Council plans to follow the meeting with visits to all regions of Georgia to meet with intellectuals and other strata of society that are dissatisfied with the government. The opposition plans a rally on November 2 in Tbilisi and they hope to surpass the scale of the protest held before Parliament on September 28.

New Charges Against Okruashvili

¶4. (U) On October 3 Deputy Attorney General Nikoloz Gvaramia made public new charges against Okruashvili and several former high-ranking Defense Ministry officials, including the former Head of Procurements at the MOD, Iason Chikhladze. The charges allege the Ministry paid USD200,000 over actual cost for aviation fuel purchased from a company co-owned by high ranking Defense Ministry officials and their business associates. Gvaramia presented statements from the head of security for Okruashvili's close friend, Kibar Khalvashi, and Chikhladze. Gvaramia also outlined further details of the purchase of Okruashvili's party headquarters for less than fair value.

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MP From Ruling Party calls Okruashvili a "Political Prisoner"

¶5. (U) Guguli Magradze, was the first MP from Saakashvili's National Movement Party to call Okruashvili a "political prisoner." She said she does not claim Okruashvili is innocent; it is up to the courts to decide, but she questioned the timing of the arrest. She thanked Saakashvili for his reform efforts but blamed unspecified members in his administration for undermining his efforts to promote democracy. She is the first MP from the ruling National Movement to criticize the government publicly for the arrest.

More Speculation on Patarkatsishvili

¶6. (U) Georgian media continues to speculate on the plans of Georgian businessman and opposition figure, Badri Patarkatsishvili, to enter politics. David Usupashvili, leader of the Republican Party and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, leader of the Freedom party, both commented that Patarkatsishvili has always been indirectly engaged in politics and his appearance would not be a surprise.

TEFFT